

Spreckels Mansion
2080 Washington Street
San Francisco, San Francisco County
California

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL and DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
450 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, California

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PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT
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SPRECKELS MANSION

San Francisco, San Francisco County, California

ADDRESS: 2080 Washington Street

OWNER: Mrs. Alma de Bretteville Spreckels
(Mrs. Adolph B. Spreckels)

USE: Residence

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The large and handsome Francophilic mansion, built by Adolph B. Spreckels ca. 1912-1913 on a dramatic view point in San Francisco's exclusive Pacific Heights area, has long occupied a prominent visual and social role in the city. It is one of the few truly grand residences in a town which has always prided itself on social elegance, but has signally failed to match the destroyed wooden palaces of the 19th century with more substantial mansions in the 20th century. Placed at the corner of an unusually large city lot (virtually half a block of choice real estate), it looms above its neighbors in chaste classicizing French Baroque beauty - symbolic of the cultural and social prominence of its chatelaine, Alma de Bretteville Spreckels. The building is of reinforced concrete faced with white stone; the architect was George Applegarth - practitioner of meticulous period design. (His California Palace of the Legion of Honor, presented by Mr. and Mrs. Spreckels to the City of San Francisco, is a slightly later example of his skill in the French mode.) The Spreckels mansion interior, although considerably altered from the original one-family plan, still suggests the magniloquent promise of its exterior; fine examples of period furnishings occur in both Mrs. Spreckels' fine floor - the "main" first floor of the mansion now converted to an apartment for her - and in that of her daughter, Dorothy (Mrs. Charles Munn), above on the top floor.

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HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The first published account of the Spreckels Mansion appeared in the San Francisco Call for Sunday, May 24, 1913. A brief description of the residence (estimated cost: \$1,000,000) and the name of the architect, George Applegarth, accompany a drawing of the building with an elaborately formal Baroque garden cascading down the hillside site behind the house. (These garden effects were never realized.) ¹

Adolph Bernard Spreckels was one of thirteen children, son of Claus and Anna Mangel Spreckels. He ^{was} educated in San Francisco and Hanover Germany. From his father, Claus, he inherited part of a large family fortune, accumulated primarily in the processing and refining of sugar, with vast attendant enterprises in Hawaii, California and other parts of the United States. Later, A. B. Spreckels increased that inheritance through his own financial skill. His father's stone chateau, in the manner of Richard Morris Hunt's palatial residences in New York and Newport, had been badly damaged in the fire of 1906 when it lapped over Van Ness Avenue and engulfed a few properties on the west side of that thoroughfare. Adolph's brother, Rudolph, had the Newsoms build (ca. 1900) a less ambitious but large house at the northwest corner of Gough and Pacific (1900 Pacific, which still stands today as a rooming house). Another brother, John D., had a choice corner residence at the northeast corner of Pacific and Laguna (now destroyed); and his son, John D. Jr., had two residences across the street to the south (2099 Pacific and 2083 Pacific, both still standing with revised uses). In other words, the Spreckels family already occupied a number of expensive locations in Pacific Heights.

Adolph married Alma de Bretteville on May 11, 1908. Their residences after 1908 ranged from Sausalito in 1908-1909 to 1913 Franklin Street, San Francisco in 1910-1911, and then to 2100 Vallejo Street in 1912-1913. The first official record of the move to 2080 Washington Street is in the Crocker-Langley City Directory for 1914.² However, the San Francisco Water Department records indicate that service was connected for ten baths, eleven water closets and a fountain (interior), in 1912.³ Thus, it must have taken another year or more to finish the interior properly, and make possible the move recorded in the 1914 Directory.

Three children were born to Mr. and Mrs. Adolph Spreckels - Adolph Jr. (deceased), Alma (Mrs. Spreckels-Coleman), and Dorthy (Mrs. Charles Munn). A. B. Spreckels, Sr., had sided with his brother John D.,

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along with father Claus, against Rudolph and Claus A. in a dispute over a 40,000 acre Hawaiian sugar plantation about 1898-99. A family reconciliation officially took place in 1905, prior to Adolph's marriage to Alma de Bretteville; but Adolph's allegiance was essentially with J. D. Spreckels and Brothers, as well as with Spreckels Sugar, Oceanic Steamship, etc. A. B. Spreckels, Sr. died in 1924⁴.

Mrs. Spreckels married again, briefly, but has retained the Spreckels name. In more recent years, with various changes in society and her own family, Mrs. Spreckels has revised this large residence from a one-family dwelling into a group of apartments - suppressing the old principal entrance on Washington Street. Dorothy returns to spend a part of each year with her mother; she and her socially prominent husband, Charles B. Munn of Palm Beach, Florida, occupy the top floor of the house as a private apartment. Mrs. Spreckels occupies the "main" floor below, and there are other apartments on the ground floor. Many of the fine decorative objects from the mansion have found their way to the California Palace of the Legion of Honor; but many remain to remind one of Mrs. Spreckels and her daughter Dorothy's enthusiasm for French art, notably that of the 18th century.

NOTES

1. The Call was housed, before the earthquake and fire, in the lofty Claus Spreckels Building on Market Street; it is appropriate that the announcement of Adolph's new mansion should appear in this family newspaper. Technically, it was the firm of MacDonald and Applegarth which received the commission for the mansion, but George Applegarth was the principal designer.
2. Crocker-Langley Directory for San Francisco (year ending 1914), San Francisco, H. S. Crocker, 1914.
3. Information kindly supplied by Mr. J. Maxwell, San Francisco Water Department.
4. Biographical details about Adolph and Alma de Bretteville Spreckels are less copious than for other members of the family (Rudolph and John D. bulked larger in civic enterprises). Who's Who in America and the Dictionary of American Biography are the principal sources.

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Also see Men of the State of California, San Francisco, Pacific Art Company, 1901, p. 188, and Bay of San Francisco, Chicago, Lewis Publishing Company, 1892, Vol. 1, p. 354. The architect, George Applegarth, found Mr. Spreckels extremely agreeable as a client; his more genial, generous nature, contrasting with brother Rudolph's hardness, provided full scope for building enterprises on the grand scale - like his town house and the later California Palace of the Legion of Honor.

5. It was inspired by the French pavilion at the 1915 Fair in San Francisco. George Applegarth completely changed the interior (and some rear exterior) details from the Parisian original to make this into an elegant museum, on its striking situation overlooking the Golden Gate. Elaborate original landscape plans for the museum, as for the Spreckels mansion, were never realized.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

EXTERIOR

The steep hillside site upon which the Spreckels Mansion was built necessitated elevations which suggest a two-story house on Washington Street and a three-story house on the back, facing the view north. This was further emphasized in the original design by a major stair of access to the principal living floor (the "main" floor, actually the second level) in the center of the Washington Street front. Garden terraces and planting in framing urns, as well as a bronze marquee at its head, gave visual prominence to this stair and to the principal living floor it services.¹ Conversion to apartments within the framework of a one-family residence called for suppression of the main entrance on Washington Street, and use of the porte-cochere entrance at the east side of the house. Although this has not marred the general effect of the house, it has made the original interior plan less obvious. The dimensions of the house are approximately eighty feet on the north and south sides and fifty feet on the east and west sides.

George Applegarth chose a form of late French Baroque hotel facade as his stylistic motif here. The principal articulation is in the form of giant composite half or three-quarter columns, with decorated lower shafts (cabling, etc.), which rise past the main living floor

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and the top floor windows. Across the Washington Street face, the columns are coupled, with the exception of the single columns at the corners, nestled beside the corner wall sections which masquerade as very wide Tuscan pilasters. Along the east and west, there are single giant columns, as on eastern and western portions of the north face (now somewhat modified). A richly garnished entablature (with luxuriant rincaux in the frieze, and massive cornice with modillions and other enrichments) crowns the building. Above, rises a chaste balustrade with sections of stone balusters and walls alternating around the building's top; this balustrade aids in masking the actual roof which is flattened or raised (in the central section). The windows on the main floor are headed with arches; these windows are actually French doors (each leaf has eighteen panes) with an arched window above. The windows on the top floor are a form of French door of lesser size and elaboration of pane. Each of the principal top floor windows has a balcony with a richly scrolled metal balustrade; the masonry balconies appear to be supported by elaborated escutcheons in the center and heavy garlands at the sides. Stylistically, the effect is partly based on 18th century French sources and partly on later 19th century revivals of the late Baroque moving into Neo-Classical. A Parisian hotel in the Rue Cherche-Midi ² is an obvious Gallic relation for the ornamental details. George Applegarth states that he had no specific buildings in mind, as sources, but drew freely on his six year period of study in France at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. ³ The house was built of reinforced concrete (for fire protection), with an exterior facing of dressed Utah limestone in the color and effect of French Caen stone. (Protective coverings suggested by the architect to preclude erosion from the moist, warm, salt air of San Francisco were delayed by Mrs. Spreckels; this has resulted in less perfect preservation than might have obtained.)

The structural contracts were approximately \$750,000, and indicate the scale and finesse of detail in this superb residence.

On the north face, the central section of the facade comes out in a semicircular bay. Originally the top portion of this semicircular projection was an open porch; this has been glassed in to serve as Mr. and Mrs. Munn's bridge room and solarium. Aside from the suppression of the Washington Street stair of access, there has been comparatively little modification of the exterior, with the minor exceptions already noted above. On the west face, the central arch of the main floor, (originally filled in) has a small square window for Mrs. Spreckels' bathroom. Some of the original terracing

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and almost all of the original enclosing balustrade-fencing around the property remains. A former garage on the northeast corner of the property (facing onto Jackson Avenue) is now the headquarters of the Salvage Shop of the Patrons of Art and Music (California Palace of the Legion of Honor). The large swimming pool - one of the very rare private enclosed swimming pools in San Francisco - dates from more recent times. It was built into the hillside northeast of the house by means of thirty foot caissons sunk into the slope with a ten-foot high fence around but not roofed. After bad weather and flying leaves made this open pool impractical, it was covered with a sliding electric roof designed by George Livermore and built by Maddock and Company.⁴ Architect Ted Moulton added decorative enrichments of the interior and air-conditioning.

INTERIOR

The Spreckels Mansion consists essentially of three interior floors and a basement. The "main" floor is on the second level of the Washington Street face (third floor of the north face), following the prototype of the usual European piano nobile. Although the original entrance was on Washington Street, in the center of the south face of the house, this has been eliminated in favor of an entrance through the porte-cochere at the east. On this "first" floor, which is at ground level of the porte-cochere (below ground level on the Washington Street face and above on the north face), there are various smaller rooms and apartments.⁵ A long corridor runs east to west; at its northwest corner was and is the elevator, the principal access to the upper levels - in addition to the service stairs - since the suppression of the main interior and exterior stair oriented to Washington Street. On the "second" or "main" floor is Mrs. Spreckels' apartment. This was once the entertainment center of the house, with a large ballroom at the west and a large oval dining room and living room at the east. Adjacent to the ballroom on the south was a reception room. In the center was a magnificent hall with curving stair rising up to the west. At the north, facing the view were a central circular or "Pompeiiian" room with a central fountain. To the east were pantries servicing the dining room. This floor was later modified with various interior divisions; and the main entrance stair from Washington Street was suppressed altogether. On the view side (north) there was a bedroom for Dorothy at the west. A bedroom for Adolph Jr. in the center.

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Between Dorthy's bedroom (called "the little Princess's room") and her mother's bedroom in the former space of the ballroom (along the west side of the house) is a bathroom which still retains the original ballroom fireplace. The dining room is as planned in the original house; the interior has been painted apple-green to match the apple-green furniture.

Mrs. Munn's (Dorothy Spreckels) apartment, on the top floor, was handsomely surveyed in an article in San Francisco (magazine) for July, 1963.⁶ A long east-west corridor divides it (like the corridor of the "first" floor); above is the original stained-glass roof of this corridor.

Opening off the corridor are a group of opulently furnished rooms (the furniture is primarily French 18th century, or modern adaptations of 18th century European designs). Mrs. Munn's dining room is at the southeast corner; the kitchen is adjacent at the northeast. Continuing along the north face of the house at this level are storage and stair areas, then a large living room, which expands into the recently glassed-in solarium or bridge room in the center of the north face. (George Livermore, architect; Archibald Taylor, decorator). A plastic dome and continuous strip windows provide brilliant illumination of this solarium.

Fireplaces and cornices in dining and living rooms suggest the period flavor of the house; those in the dining room are Adamesque, whereas, those in the living room are Georgian. The furniture, as suggested above, is 18th century or modern. At the west are Mr. (southwest corner) and Mrs. (northwest corner) Munn's bedrooms. Mrs. Munn's elegantly mirrored bath and dressing room lies between her bedroom and the living room on the north face. Along the south (Washington Street) face of the floor are various guest rooms and a bath which still retains the character of the original building. (There is a frieze of putti above tile walls with a tiled dado of iris; the massive fixtures have English brass fittings.)

The basement (the lowest floor facing the north, or lowest part of the house) now consists of service rooms for laundry and ironing, as well as the housing of the extremely large heating and electrical system of this house - which is essentially hotel-sized. Necessary technical modifications of both plumbing and wiring have occurred when interior changes made these relevant. Access to the pool can be

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either from the porte-cochere area or directly from the basement level. The pool is kept at a constant 89 degrees. Its interior contains, in addition to the oversized pool, two dressing rooms at the east, with a space next to the pool for relaxation and entertaining.

NOTES (Arch. Info.)

1. The elegant entrance stairway on the Washington Street front was removed when the interior was "converted" to apartments. In a photograph, published in Architect and Engineer in 1914, the design is essentially completed, although the elaborate bronze marquee does not appear; this may have been an afterthought.
2. Banister Fletcher, History of Architecture, p. 695 E.
3. Interview with Mr. Applegarth in December, 1963; it was Maybeck who inspired a younger group of architects, including Applegarth, Arthur Brown and John Bakewell to go to France.
4. The original pool was finished in 1958; the roof was added in 1960. See San Francisco (magazine), July, 1963, p. 40.
5. It is said that an indoor pool was planned in the area to the northeast of this floor, and that the plumbing is still ready for this project; the architect, George Applegarth, says this is entirely apocryphal. This floor was originally called the "first" basement and contained servants rooms to the northeast with a large kitchen in the center of the north side (under the circular "Pompeian Room" above). To the south were storage rooms (for wine, etc.), and a boiler room was at the west. Most of these services have been moved to the present basement (the "second" basement) below. Service stairs ascend the house on the northeast.
6. San Francisco (magazine), July, 1963, pp. 34-40.

SUPPLEMENTAL SOURCES and MATERIALS

Books

- Baird, Joseph A., Jr., Time's Wondrous Changes: San Francisco Architecture, 1776-1915, San Francisco, California Historical Society, 1962, p. 43 and p. 47.

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Various biographical studies of eminent Americans - such as Who's Who in America, Dictionary of American Biography, etc.

Interviews

J. A. Baird with Mrs. Marc Cremer, July, 1963

J. A. Baird with George Applegarth, December, 1963

Newspapers and Periodicals

Architect and Engineer, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 2 (September, 1914),
p. 72 (Illus. of Spreckels Mansion).

San Francisco (Magazine), Vol. 5b, No. 10 (July, 1963), pp. 34-40

San Francisco Call, May 25, 1913 (Illustration of house and
proposed garden, which was never laid out as indicated here).

SITE

A number of older houses had to be moved from the site to make construction of the 2080 property possible. Approximately six houses fronting on Jackson Street and one or two facing Washington Street were hauled away. (Mrs. Spreckels was determined to salvage them; a very large frame house on Washington Street went down that street with a cable line running beneath to provide uninterrupted service.)

The final lot dimensions, as recorded in the 1963 Assessor's book, were 175 feet on Washington Street, $255.4\frac{1}{2}$ on Octavia, 177.6 on Jackson, and $127.8\frac{1}{4}$ plus 127.686 on the eastern side.

Octavia Street has become a kind of private road on the western side of the property. It is unfortunate that the original plans for landscaping were shelved. The total effect would have been immeasurably enhanced with a splendid garden setting at the rear - down the hillside, and controlled planting of trees (probably avoided for view reasons). A strong retaining wall encircles the property, also of dressed Utah stone like the mansion.

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